TEACHING DESCRIPTIVE WRITING THROUGH GENRE-BASED APPROACH

Fadlin Hadini
lindhadini@gmail.com

M. Yunus
myunus_nur@yahoo.com

Fiftinova
fiftinova.hakim@gmail.com

Abstract: The objective of this study was to find out whether or not there was any significant improvement of students' skills in writing descriptive texts after they were taught by using Genre-Based Approach. The method of this study was a pre-experimental study which used one group pretest-posttest design. The population was the eighth grade students of SMP N 14, in the academic year 2013/2014 with the total number of 399 students. The total number of the sample was 39 students. The experimental group was taught writing descriptive texts by using Genre-Based Approach. To gain the data, the pretest and posttest were administered to the experimental group. The data obtained from the test were analyzed by using paired sample t-test. The calculation was done by using Statistical Package for Social Science 21 (SPSS 21). The results of test showed that the students got better scores in the posttest than in the pretest. The mean score of pretest was 44.79 while the mean score of posttest was 72.38. Therefore, there was a significant improvement of students' skills in writing descriptive texts after they were taught by using Genre-Based Approach. It was also found that the writing aspects namely, content, text organization, and language improved significantly. Conclusively, in this study, Genre-Based Approach can improve students' descriptive writing.

Keywords: *descriptive text, writing skill, genre-based approach, eight graders*

Writing is one of the forms of communication. It communicates writers' idea and purpose to readers. Writing in English is used either in academic or non academic purposes. It is needed in our activities, namely, to send email to keep in touch with friends, to write a cover letter, to apply for the job and to write a personal statement to get a scholarship. Moreover, in 2015, Indonesia will encounter ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). It is stated in AFTA (1998) that the contract documents should be written in English. In case the documents are not in the English, the English translation must be included. Therefore, in this free trade era, the writing competencies are demanded. These AFTA workers are expected to

write a readable document and this document should be written in English. Besides, writing is important because it is a skill which develops critical thinking, for example, writing arguments or expressing an opinion on a particular topic and supporting it with evidence (Cavdar & Doe, 2012). Schneider (2002, p.1) states "critical thinking has been an important issue in education for many years." "It is important for a well-educated person to be able to make well-informed judgments, be able to explain their reasoning and be able to solve unknown problems" (Thomas, 2012, p. 26).

Moreover, students need to master writing skill in order to help them in their studies and future career. Graham & Perin (2007, p. 8-9) emphasizes that "the demand for writing proficiency is not limited to professional jobs, but extends to clerical and support positions in government, construction, manufacturing, service industries, and elsewhere". Therefore, students should practice to write since the beginner level so that they are able to write well.

In line with it, in Kurikulum Satuan Tingkat Pendidikan (KTSP) or *School-Based Curriculum (2005)* states that junior high school students are supposed to be able to communicate in spoken and written ways. One of the genres that they should learn in writing skill is descriptive text. Descriptive text is a text that describes particular people, places or things. The students' ability to identify and categorize in describing the things will be helpful for their future experience. Knapp & Watkins (2009) emphasizes that "descriptive text as the genre of describing is one of the first skills emergent language-users learn to control" (p. 97). In order to help students to be able to compose a good descriptive text, teacher should give enough guidance during the teaching and learning process of writing descriptive text.

However, "writing is considered as the most difficult skill for language learners because they need to have a certain amount of L2 background knowledge about the rhetorical organizations, appropriate language use or specific lexicon with which they want to communicate to their readers" (Tangpermpoon, 2008, p. 1). It also happens in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Elashri (2013, p. 3) says "writing for EFL students is not an easy matter, especially when the students' English competence is not very well developed". Students get some difficulties to compose the writing. These difficulties include choosing appropriate vocabulary, organizing the structure relevant to the topic or the purpose of writing, understanding the culture of a target country, following correct grammar rules, and integrating ideas (Firkins, Forey, & Sengupta, 2007; Holmes & Moulton, 2003; Hyland, 2003; Kim, 2006; Qian 2010). Those difficulties require teachers' role to overcome the situation

Knapp and Watkin (2009) state "learning to write is a difficult and complex series of processes that require a range of explicit teaching methodologies throughout all the stages of learning" (p. 14). The process of teaching will run more effectively if the teacher explains explicitly the skills to be gained by the students after the learning process is finished (Emilia, 2012). It means teaching writing needs process and teachers' role to give guidance to the students how to compose the good version of the text.

Meanwhile, based on the informal interview with three eighth grade English teachers in SMP Negeri 14 Palembang on January 13, 2014, it was

found that they did not really pay attention on teaching writing. They say that the National Examination demands students to answer the reading comprehension test. In teaching descriptive texts, one of them taught descriptive writing by using realia as the media, discussing the vocabulary, and asking students to write. Meanwhile, the others told the topic and asked students to compose the text directly. Consequently, based on a mini survey which the writer conducted in this school on January 15, 2014, most students stated that they felt difficult in generating ideas. In addition, their lack of vocabulary and lack of grammar made their writing unclear. It can be assumed that the teachers ignore the process of writing. They did not give enough guidance in students' writing.

To deal with this problem, Genre-Based Approach is an appropriate approach. Genre-Based Approach (GBA) is an approach which guides students to understand the social purpose, organization, and language features on every kind of text. Tuan (2011 p. 1) states that "each of the texts has the social purpose that reflects its schematic structure or text organization and language features, namely grammar, vocabulary, connectors, etc that writers have to use to translate their idea into readable text".

Genre-Based Approach offers four stages in the teaching cycle as the diagram below (Figure. 2). In this study, the writer applies all the stages in a fixed sequence. They are "Building Knowledge of Field (BKoF)", "Modeling of Text (MoT)", "Joint Construction of Text (JCoT)", and "Independent Construction of Text (ICoT)", consecutively.

The first stage in GBA is Building Knowledge of the Field. This stage aims to develop students' knowledge about the topic will be written. According to Gibbons (2009), in this stage teacher can apply progressive brainstorming in order to recall students' prior knowledge and the students are allowed to use first language. The students are in a group of four students. They write some information that they know about the topic by using a particular color-pen. Next, in a few minutes the students leave their works and move to the next group. They add some information to their friends' paper with their color-pen and move to the other groups until they are back to their previous position. After that, they report to the classroom about what they have in their paper now. For other activities, some pictures and some kinds of texts related to the topic are shown and become the students' guidance. The students discuss the vocabulary, phrases, expressions which are used. Besides, the grammar which is used in describing someone or something is introduced to the students.

The second stage in GBA Modeling of Text (MoT). This stage aims to guide students to gain the knowledge about a particular genre. Students are introduced to be familiar with the purpose, organization and language features of a particular genre (Gibbons, 2009, p 115). The teacher explains the grammar and text organizations of the particular genre. Then, several models of the particular genre will be distributed to the students. They will compare the models and focus on the language features of descriptive text. In addition, Gibbons (2009) suggests a text reconstruction as the activity that focuses on the structure and language of the descriptive text. The students will arrange the jumble sentence into a coherent text.

The third stage in GBA is Joint Construction of Text (JCoT). At this stage, the teacher and students work together to compose the text. The topic at this stage is not exactly the same with the one will be written for the independent writing (Gibbons, 2009). The teacher becomes the scribe in front of the class. Each of students delivers his/her idea in describing someone or something. The students will be guided to be in line with the genre of descriptive text in the context of grammar, text organization, and language features.

The fourth stages in GBA Independent Construction of Text (ICoT). At this stage, students already have the knowledge and skills to write independently. Before coming to this stage, the teacher makes sure that students have already gotten the competencies. The students are asked to compose descriptive text individually. They draft, revise, and submit their work to the teacher. Further, they get feedback from the teacher about their writing.

There are three unique characteristics of Genre-Based Approach (GBA) in the teaching of descriptive texts. GBA describes a sequence of teaching and learning activities that prepare students to be successful independent writers. Besides, GBA gives the explicit knowledge (language features, text organization, and grammar) to be learned by students in writing the descriptive texts. Knapp & Watkin (2009) state "without these codes the process of writing can be frustrating and unproductive process" (p. 17). Furthermore, in conducting GBA, the stages are flexible or not a lockstep. It means teacher may omit one of the stages if she believes the students do not need that step. In other words, the implementation of GBA is still running if one of the stages is not applied.

One of the unique characteristics of GBA is that it gives the explicit knowledge (language features, text organization, and grammar) to be learned by students in writing the descriptive texts. The explicit knowledge is introduced and explained in each of the stages in GBA. It can help students to write the descriptive texts independently. According to Amogne (2013) having understand about characteristics and genre features, students can be asked to write the better text individually. Therefore, this study also investigated the improvement of three writing aspects namely, content, text organization and language.

METHODOLOGY

The population of this study was 399 eighth grade students of SMP N 14 Palembang in academic year 2013/2014. To get the sample the writer used convenience sampling technique. Scott and Morrison (2006, p. 221) say "convenience sampling occurs when people and things are selected as a subset because they are available to access." Class VIII.2 was the sample as recommended by the school and the English teacher. According to the teacher's explanation, the students in this class had low English achievement and low motivation in learning English. Thus, the students' competence was appropriate with the objective of this study which was to improve the students' writing ability.

The data were collected by test. The type of the test is writing test. Pretest and posttest was used in this study. The pretest was given to the sample in order to know the students' writing skill level before the treatment and the posttest was given to measure the students' writing level of all

learning tasks after the treatment. The results of pretest and posttest scores were compared to find the mean score.

To analyze the score from the test, the result between two groups was compared by using t-test. The t-test is a statistical test that is used to determine if there is a significant difference between the mean or average scores of two groups. A paired sample t-test was used to determine whether or not there was significant difference between the students' average score under different condition, before and after treatment. To determine whether or not there was any significant improvement of students' skills in writing descriptive texts after they are taught by using Genre-Based Approach, the paired sample t-test was used.

FINDINGS

From the table below it could be seen that in the pretest the students' scores were in the ranges of failed to good categories. After the students got the treatment in writing the descriptive text by using Genre-Based Approach, the students' scores were in the ranges of low to very good categories. It could be concluded that after the writer gave treatment by using Genre-Based Approach in teaching writing descriptive texts, the scores of the students' descriptive writing improved.

Table 1
Score Distribution of Descriptive Writing

Score Interval	Level of Achievement	Pretest		Posttest	
		N	%	N	%
86-100	Very good	-	-	1	2.5
71-85	Good	-	-	23	59
56-70	Enough	5	13	14	36
41-55	Low	21	48.4	1	2.5
0-40	Failed	13	-	-	0
Total		39	100	39	100

The result of pretest and posttest of experimental group to find out whether or not there is any significant improvement of students' skills in writing descriptive texts after they are taught by using Genre-Based Approach

Table 2
Result of Paired Sample t-test

Group	Test	Mean	Std. Dev	Sig, (2-tailed)
Exp Group	Prt	44.79	10.60	.000
	Post	72.38	6.88	

The analysis of the paired sample t-test in the experimental group showed that mean of the pretest was 44.79, and the mean of the posttest was 72.38. The standard deviation of the pretest was 10.608 and the standard deviation of the posttest was 6.881. The standard error mean of the pretest was 1.699 and the standard error mean of the posttest was 1.102. The t-obtained of both pretest and posttest was 19.202. The degree of freedom (df) for both pretest and posttest was 38. At the significance level < 0.05 for one tailed testing with the degree of freedom 38, the critical value of t-table is 1.686. It showed that the critical value of t-table was lower than t-obtained that was 1.686<19.202. Since the t-obtained (19.202) was higher than the critical value of t-table (1.686), it could be stated that there was a significant improvement of students' descriptive writing after the treatment.

Table 3
Paired Sample T-test aspects of writing

Aspects	Pretest Score	Posttest Score	Mean diff	Sig.
Content	19.85	28.67	8.82	.000
Text Org	18.77	28.26	9.48	.000
Language	2.56	25.74	10.7	.000

The data shown above presented the improvement of students' descriptive writing score from all three aspects. The three aspects namely, content (12.675>1.686), text organization (14.815>1.686), and language (19.282>1.686) improved significantly. From the results, it could be inferred that there was a significant improvement of students' descriptive writing in all aspects: content, text organization, and language after they were taught by using Genre-Based Approach.

The results of the study revealed that the students' writing of descriptive text improved after they got the treatment. It could be seen from the data before the treatment, the mean score of pretest was 44.79 while the mean score of posttest was 72.38. Then, it was found that the t-obtained (19.202) was higher than t-table (1.686). Since the t-obtained was higher than the critical value of t-table, it could be stated that there was a significant improvement of students' descriptive writing after they were taught by using Genre-Based Approach. The result of this study was in line with the previous studies conducted by Tuan, (2011); Ahn, (2012); Elashri, (2013); Rezvani, Aqdam, and Saeidi, (2013). It proved that the instructions in GBA improved the students' skills in writing descriptive text. Due to the four stages ((BKoF, MoT, JCoT, and ICoT)) that applied in Genre-Based Approach, the students were prepared to be successful independent writers.

The first stage is BKoF. In this stage, the writer asked students to do progressive brainstorming to review the students' knowledge about the topic. The topic was cat. The students were in group and allowed to express their idea in Bahasa. The opportunities to write in Bahasa made students easier to jot down the information. Gibbon (2009) mentions that using the first language in the classroom is able to make students think about the topic deeply.

The second stage is MoT. The writer showed students one text model with its text organization was already marked. Then the teacher guided students to discuss the purpose and the text organization of the descriptive text. Derewianka (2004, p. 7) explains that "the function of each stage of the text organization should be discussed." The purpose of this activitiy is to explain the students that descriptive text has a number of characteristics that make it different from genres. Further, some students explained in front of the class about what the functions of general sstatement and description are.

The third stage is JCoT. The writer and the students composed descriptive writing of one paragraph about cat together in the whiteboard. The writer encouraged students not to afraid to state their idea. This resulted some students mentioned, "has long tail", "has orange fur", or "has claws". Although they were not complete sentences, at least the students were brave to say their idea in the classroom and showed that they knew the description of the cat. Further, the writer suggested the proper words or sentences until the text finished. The writer's role was not only guided students to understand the background of the field and explained the language features, grammar, and the text organization of the text, but also guided the students to compose the text collaboratively. Hyland (2007, p. 159) says "the teacher provides initial explicit knowledge and guided practice, moves to sharing responsibility for developing texts, and gradually withdraws support until the learner can work alone."

The fourth stage is ICoT. Before coming to this stage, the students already comprehended the purpose, grammar, language features and text organization of descriptive text. The writer asked students to write descriptive text of one paragraph about elephant individually. The students wrote the draft, revised, did proofreading, and submitted their writing. When the students were writing, the writer gave feedback to the students. For example, the student wrote on a piece of paper "Elephant have long nose". The writer reminds him that the correct verb for the singular pronoun is has. Then, the student revised it. Further, the students submitted their works. Gibbons (2009, p. 119) suggests that "in the independent writing, the teacher should remind students to write an initial draft and edit and revise their writing."

Besides, the improvement of writing score from three aspects (content, text organization, and language) was proven by the statistical analysis done by using paired sample t-test. The t-obtained of content aspect was 12.675, the t-obtained of text organization aspect was 14.815, and the t-obtained of language was 19.282, whereas the t-table was 1.686. From the results, it could be inferred that there was a significant improvement of students' skills in writing descriptive texts in all aspects: content, text organization, and language after they were taught by using Genre-Based Approach since its t-obtained was greater than t-table.

Genre-Based Approach facilitated the students to know exactly what they should write and how they transferred their ideas into the correct format of descriptive writing. In Modeling of Text stage, the students were displayed the good versions of descriptive writing and

were taught the grammar, text organization, and language features of descriptive text explicitly. They followed the text organization and suggested language features as what they saw from the model texts. Also, in the Independent Construction of Text stage, the students were provided writing framework and given feedback. The writer decided to give the students writing framework because the students confused how to compose the text in chronological and coherent order. Gibbons (2009) agrees that the teacher may give the writing framework to the students who are in the beginning level of English. Further, the students got feedback about their descriptive writing. After the students used the writing framework and got the feedback, they could compose the better version of the descriptive writing in all aspects of writing, such as content, text organization, and language.

In addition, it was found that the improvement of language aspect was the greatest among the three aspects. As stated in Kim (2006) that in teaching Genre in writing, teaching the organization structure and linguistic features should become the important points. By recognizing the organization and linguistic features of the text, the readers can identify the text purpose.

CONCLUSION
Genre-Based Approach (GBA) was effective to teach descriptive writing. From the data collected during the process of the study, the results of posttest of experimental group showed that most of the students made improvement significantly. That is, they could follow the teacher's instruction and compose descriptive text of one paragraph based on the explicit knowledge explained during the treatment. The results also presented

that the t–obtained of writing aspects namely, content, text organization, and language were above the t-table. Hence, there was also a significant improvement of students' descriptive writing in all aspects: content, text organization, and language after they were taught by using Genre-Based Approach. Based on the results of the data, it was clear that Genre-Based Approach improved the students' descriptive writing significantly.

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About the Authors:

Fadlin Hadini is the graduate of the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University.

Drs. M. Yunus, M.Ed., and Fiftinova, S.S., M.Pd are the lecturers of the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University.